

Leaving, chapter 4: Open lines of communication

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Category: X-overs

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-04-19 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-04-19 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 15:56:30

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 10,703

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: The chase, day two. Do plans ever go right with Ranma?  
(Ranma/Slayers)

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Disclaimer :

Ranma 1/2 is not mine. Slayers is not mine.

Note : This is a Ranma/Slayers fusion, in the sense that the Slayers characters and magic system were incorporated in the Ranmaverse, and changed to better fit Modern Japan, with a different dynamic between the characters. C&C is greatly appreciated and can be sent to [ranma\\_666@hotmail.com](mailto:ranma_666@hotmail.com) or ICQ# 45118495. Thank you.

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What happened before:

Prologue: Ranma jumps off a cliff in front of everyone, and is thought dead. Akane finds out about Ryoga's curse.

Chapter 1: We find out how Ranma survived the fall. Akane sees Ranma and goes back to Nerima to get help. Everyone of the normal cast finds out too and goes.

Chapter 2: We see tidbits of the first week of Ranma's new life. Amongst other things, Lina sets Ranma up with a girl in their class who's interested in him, with the excuse of tutoring.

Chapter 3: The Nerima gang chases Ranma, with little success as he shows them his new power. Nabiki gets a taste of her own medicine as she attempts to make a 'deal' with Lina, forcing her not to tell anything... much.

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" " spoken ' ' thought < > Chinese

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Leaving, chapter 4

Open Lines of Communication

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Few people knew this, but Ranma had a head on his shoulders when it came to day-to-day things. Not big things, but the little things that made life slightly more practical and easier to deal with. Like an alarm clock designed to be thrown at the wall to be stopped from ringing.

\*riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii--\* \*BANG\*

Case in point. Ranma groggingly pushed his body away from the bed, his hair messy by having his head buried in his pillow. He dimly registered feeling his baseball-shaped clock fall in the vicinity of his legs, but didn't care much about his disturber at this point.

His eyes closed and his arms gave out at the same time, and he fell, bouncing two times before settling on the bed. After a few seconds, one arm stretched backwards, searching blindly for the clock. After groping around for a few times, his fingertips finally felt the rough surface, and a few worthless attempts later managed to roll it enough to get a good handhold. In one sharp motion, he brought the thing to his eye-level.

To stare at the settings controls. Grumbling, he turned the thing around. 8:32. Why in the nine hells of this goddamned forsaken Earth had he set his alarm that early?!?!? They had studied until three in the morning, for god's sake!!!

"Oh, yeah. My turn to make breakfast." he recalled, grumbling. With a flick of his wrist, the clock disappeared behind him, and he started the gruesome task of getting up. It took him five minutes, most of that time spent with his eyes closed, but he eventually managed to stand without supporting himself. He looked down at his wrinkled outfit, stared at his wrinkled outfit, decided that his wrinkled outfit could go to hell on a Sunday morning and headed to the kitchen, not bothering to even try to smooth his wrinkled outfit.

Once there, he took out a frying pan, put it on the stove, and stared at it. Then he stared at it some more. After a good two minutes, he decided to let it all go to hell, and patted his pant pockets. Taking out his wallet, he checked what money he had left, found it satisfactory and picked up the phone to order take-out.

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Nabiki put the phone down and sighed happily. "Nothing like room service." she said with a smile to the half-awake population of the hotel suite. She leaned back on the couch and stretched, finally putting her arms behind her head. "So," she asked the ceiling, "what's the plan for today?"

"We lie low." Cologne replied. "We will walk around the town in pairs, and if Ranma or Lina are spotted, we stay away and observe. We are NOT to openly pursue or to make contact, and we must prevent any attempt to do so made by the three other parties involved, Kuno, Kodachi and Mousse."

Most people were still rubbing their eyes and didn't have their higher brain functions active yet, so if they heard anything they didn't respond. Nabiki took a breath in and let it out. "What's the pairings? Last time I checked, we were nine."

"Indeed." Cologne acknowledged. "I believe your talents would be more useful if you were alone, Nabiki. As for the rest of us... I believe pairings of people having no tumultuous prior relation is in order. Thus, I would think Shampoo and Kuno, Akane and Mousse, and Kodachi and Ukyo."

Nabiki raised an eyebrow, her eyes closing in thought. Even she had troubles in the morning. "I'm no behavior expert, but I don't think having Ukyo and Kodachi together is such a good idea."

From under a pile of sheets on the other couch, a weak voice could be heard saying "Somebody talking about me?" but nobody listened.

"Well, they are the two 'fiancees' with the least of history between them, and Ukyo's strong loyalties will ensure that Kodachi is kept in line. Or would you prefer your own sister to safeguard the Black Rose?" Cologne asked with a smirk.

Nabiki shuddered. "I see your point. Akane and Kodachi would make a somewhat volatile mix."

"Hey! What's that supposed to mean?" Cologne just looked at Nabiki, who grinned in response. Three knocks prevented any kind of reply, and Nabiki got up to get to the door.

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Ranma paid the delivery boy, looked at his last 1000 yen bill and, sighing, gave it as a tip. He took the six large brown bags and after closing the door with his butt headed for the dining room. "Lina!"

He put the bags down. "Lina! Get up!" He went to the kitchen to get some plates and utensils and came back. "LINA!!!" He started placing them on the table. "FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, GET UP!!!"

Still not a sound from upstairs. He opened the first bag and started taking out containers. He sighed, shaking his head, and continued in a normal tone of voice, a small smile on. "Well, if you don't want any breakfast, sis, I'll just help myself to your--"

"NO YOU DON'T!!!" came a shout from upstairs, followed by the sounds of someone scrambling to get up and get dressed, then running down the hall and the stairs. Lina appeared in the doorway, her pink and yellow outfit on crooked, her hair messy and unkempt, even worse than his own. She looked at him with a very angry expression, sat down and opened the first bag within her reach.

Ranma looked at her with a bemused smile, emptying the last bag. He then sat down himself and began to eat. The two ravaged the take-out boxes in record speed, all in complete silence. Once finished, the two leaned back on their chairs. "I'm full." Lina said, patting her stomach.

"I hope so," Ranma replied, looking at her, "your stomach is halfway out to your--" Contrary to habit, it wasn't a blunt object to the head that stopped Ranma, but an unhealthy large red glow surrounding his sister.

Scrambling away nervously, not turning his back to her, Ranma started searching for a way out. "Err... I mean..." Lina was now up and slowly stepping towards him. "I mean, hum, your stomach was sticking halfway out to... No! No! That's it! I meant that it looks like your stomach is sticking halfway out! That's it! Honest! No comparison whatsoever! I swear! Your breasts aren't small!" Ranma stopped flailing his arms and thought to himself. "That wasn't the right thing to say, now, was it?"

\*WHAM\*

"Nope. Definitively not the right thing to say." he muttered to himself, lying face down with a surprisingly intact chair on his head and a loud ringing in his ears. He was seeing three Linas swaying back and forth as they turned a cold shoulder on him and marched upstairs.

One hand went up to take the chair off. As soon as he touched it, the ringing in his ears stopped. Confused, he released it, and the ringing returned, though softer.

He pushed the chair off and got up. After picking the thing up, he tapped on it with his knuckle. "Metal?" He tapped some more. "Damn, Father wasn't kidding when he said the house was 'Lina-proof'."

"I heard that!" Lina shouted from upstairs.

"Oh, geez, I can't handle her like that." Ranma said nervously, with a small note of fear in his voice. "Better let her calm down in the bath. I'm going to practice outside." He went through the kitchen to get to the back door.

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Nabiki closed the hotel room door behind her. She was the first to go, so that the others wouldn't have the idea of following her, since she knew a few things about Ranma that she couldn't share. She swore in front of everyone she wasn't going to visit Ranma or anything like that, but just in case she wanted to leave before everyone, so that no one lost their day following her pointlessly.

As she took the elevator, she wondered what route she would take. She knew that any of them were strong enough to intimidate the doorman outside into telling them which way she went. So she should go-- no, they'd think that a 'devious girl' like her would do that, so she should go the right way, but if they thought that she thought-- She shook her head. She shouldn't expect those kind of people to think beyond the second degree. Then again, they've proved time and again

that they usually act on the fly, going with the first reaction that cross their minds. Since they'd be in a hurry to catch up to her, they wouldn't take the time to think. So the wrong way was the way to go.

There was a nice 'ding' as the elevator stopped and the doors opened. Nabiki walked out, making sure the doorman at the hotel's entrance saw her and where she was going. She made the wrong turn at the next street, turning right, just to be sure. Two streets down she made another right, passing behind the hotel, and one more right three streets away from it.

Two intersections after passing the hotel's street, she ducked into a side alley. Making sure no one was watching, she took three running steps and jumped, one hand on top of the wall to help her flip over it, then landed on one knee. It was rather ironic that Ranma's own training, a 'requirement' of her father's so she could go alone to college, came in to help her in this situation. Considering his own training, Ranma had been a remarkable teacher; when she had gone to college, she had been able to go roofhopping, barely. She had lost most of it, but she still had enough to fend off any aggressive pursuers.

Running at a good pace, at a practiced speed that would allow maximum speed for the minimum of attention, she made her way through town, turning every other intersection. Her watch said she still had a few minutes before the others left, but she had never known them, or at least the teenagers, to have anything remotely recognizable as patience.

She finally came to the street going around the mountain, a rather high stone wall surrounding it, and looking left and right she found it surprisingly empty. She shrugged, not one to question Lady Luck, and after taking another running start jumped over it, this time needing both hands and a small amount of strength to flip over it. Upon landing, she found herself with more inertia than she could handle, so rolled a few times to get rid of it, putting her out of the dirt path along the stone wall and into the bushes.

Her head came out the bush and she spit out a leaf or two. She looked left and right, but because of the slow curve didn't see the entrance in the wall. Getting out of there, she picked a random direction and started walking, brushing her clothes.

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Ranma didn't have to look to extend a hand and grab the book flying his way. He turned around and crossed his arms, smiling at Lina in the doorway. "You'll have to do better than that, sis."

He scrambled to get out of the way of the flaming ball of glowing red light coming his way. The explosion knocked him forward, however, and all limbs extended fell face first. He looked up in time to see Lina pointing another fireball in his face. "Well, okay. That wasn't bad." he confessed sheepishly.

"Not bad my ass. I nailed you! Admit it!" She pushed her hand, and the energy ball, closer to his face to emphasize her point.

Ranma put his face back against the ground to hide his grin. "Of

course you did, Lina! You're the best sorceress alive! A genius even!" he said in his best innocent voice. He counted to three, not needing to look to know Lina was looking up, eyes half-closed, fanning herself with her other hand, a smile on and words of alleged modesty barely passing her lips.

He quickly twisted, turning his body on the ground as if he was walking, and quickly tripped Lina, bringing her down with a yelp, the red light spell in her hand flying off into the sky. In one quick move, Ranma had the book under her chin, pressing upwards, while his legs held hers down and his other arm was twisting her left wrist. "Now who's nailing who?"

"Grr..." As much as she hated to admit it, Lina knew she was beaten. Even with one arm free, she wasn't strong enough to get out of Ranma's hold, and the book holding her chin up made it impossible to cast spells before Ranma could press harder. "I'll get you for this..." she strained to say through clenched teeth, and Ranma's chuckle only angered her more.

Swinging his legs over him, Ranma got to his feet in a perfectly executed backflip. He looked at the book and brushed his pants with his free hand. "Now, what do you want, sis? What's the spellbook for?"

Lina got up, brushing off the dirt and grass. "That spell you used yesterday, to trap the bimbo's shadow with \*my\* \*favorite\* \*dagger\*," she said with a dark twinge, "you said it was in there?"

Ranma started leafing through the end of the book as he slowly walked back to the house. "Yeah, it's in there. You couldn't find it?"

She knocked him on the head. "You said it was in some other language! And how am I supposed to find it when you didn't even tell me the name of the damn thing!?"

He rubbed his head absently with a sheepish look. "Yeah. I guess. Okay." He flipped a few more pages. "Ah! There it is! Eh--"

"Lemme see! Lemme see!" Lina shouted, taking the book from his hands. Her face darted left and right as she looked at the page. She then pulled back her face and tried to clobber him with the book. "I can't read that, you idiot!"

He swiped the book from her hand. "Cut that out! I told you it was in some other language!" He crossed his arms, looking at her sternly. "But I'm sure we have better things to do than study weird magic spells. We've got eight of the most stubborn people after me, not to mention a potential snitch."

Lina shook a finger with a smile. "Ah, don't worry, big brother. I've made a deal with Nabiki, remember? By now, your friends surely told her how you got rid of them yesterday and she'll think twice about crossing us. Trust me."

He took a breath and sighed. "I guess, but Nabiki is still Nabiki. Trusting her is a double-edged sword. Still..." He turned and started walking. "We got nothing better to do, and we sure as hell can't get out to do anything, so I might as well..." He looked over his shoulder. "You coming? I sure ain't gonna do this standing in the

kitchen, you know."

"I knew you'd see it my way!" she said cheerfully, slapping him on the back as she caught up with him in the stairs. "So what is it called again?"

\*sigh\* "I haven't told you yet, Lina." he said, hanging his head.

"Right, right, right." she replied. "So what's it called?"

Ranma sighed again. "Can't you wait five seconds for us to get to the study?"

"Why should I when you can tell me right now?" She started tugging on his sleeve. "Come on, Ranma, just tell me already. Come on!"

He simply put a hand over his lowered face. 'She didn't act so pushy a week ago... I hope it's only temporary.' He opened the door to the study. "Come on. Just get me some paper and a pen and I'll translate it for you."

While Ranma sat down at the table, Lina went to a desk to get the items. "Say, how can you read it, anyway? Father only taught you the language of magic and a little latin, same as me."

"I don't know. I just stared at it long enough for the symbols to make sense." He shrugged. "As long as I can read a couple more spells, who cares?" He leafed through the end of the book. "Ah! There it is." Lina scooted her chair closer to him to get a good look. He pointed at the large symbols that acted as a title for the page. "You see, for some reason, the symbols for the name of the spell are totally different from normal symbols, even if they translate to the same thing. That spell is called--"

\*triiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing\*

"Huh?" Both of their heads perked up, waiting for the sound to repeat.

\*triiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing\*

"That's the phone from the shrine!" Lina suddenly remembered, taking off at high speed. Ranma looked at her go, shrugged, and returned to the book, using his index as a bookmark as he leafed further into the book.

\*triiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing\*

Ranma was only scanning the pages, not bothering to actually identify the symbols, if they were in the same language as the first spell he had decrypted.

\*triiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing\*

"WhereisitwhereisitWHEREISIT?!?!?" he could hear Lina shout from downstairs. 'Trust her to forget something like that.' Ranma thought.

\*triiiiiiiiiiiiiiii--\*

'Good.' Then Ranma blinked as he turned to a page with an actual drawing on it. 'Weird. That's the first one I see in this thing.' It was crude, but he could make it out. It looked like a hole in brown earth.

"No. Not a hole. A crater." he suddenly realized, seeing the form of a valley near the sides of the drawing. And those little squares on the side of the crater and all around it looked like houses and buildings, too. "Damn... Is that the result of that spell?" He started looking around for the description that would accompany the drawing.

"WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!?!?!?" Lina shouted into the phone, then suddenly slammed it down and ran off to the living room. "Ranma! Get down here, fast!!!"

Ranma rolled backwards to get off his fallen chair and quickly hurried to the living room, where Lina had just opened the TV. A cute short-haired woman was delivering the news. "In national news, the small town of Saira was totally destroyed near midnight last night as a giant explosion occurred right in the center of the town. Here's Tokuro Shimiwa with an on-site report."

The screen changed to a helicopter view of the town -- or rather, what little of it was left. In the center of the camera view was one big crater, and if one looked closely one could see small discolorations in rim demarking the remnants of houses and buildings. "It is yet unclear what caused this catastrophe." the reporter began. "Government officials have already ruled out airplane bombing or any kind of meteor impact. There has been very few survivors and they are currently being treated--"

"Oh my god! Father and Sylphiel are there!" Lina shouted, pointing at the crater on the screen.

"What? Are you saying this is the town they went to?" Lina nodded frantically. "Damn!" Ranma looked at the screen some more. "Well, I'm sure Father is strong enough to protect-- Waitasecond!" Ranma scrambled upstairs at full speed, a confused Lina staring at him go.

He came back with the spellbook, and once stopping near Lina started going over the last few pages. He found the drawing, and holding the book backwards showed it to Lina. "Looks familiar?"

Lina looked at the picture, then at the TV, then at the drawing, then back at the screen. "What the hell..." She grabbed the book from his hands and held the drawing just over the television, from her point of view. "It's... the same thing. They look the same." She lowered the book and looked at Ranma. "Are you saying that a \*spell\* did that to the town?" she asked, pointing.

Ranma took the book back as Lina closed the TV. "I'm not sure, but why else would that drawing be in a spellbook?" he asked, looking over the first page of text of the spell. "These... characters aren't the same as the other spell. They're close, but I can't really make them out."

"The name! Check the name!" Lina prompted, pointing to the larger



symbols. "We can ask Father later!"

"Yeah, yeah, get your fingers out of my vision if you want me to read that!" he snapped back, pushing her hands away. "Let me see..." Ranma sat on the couch, leaning back and turning a side lamp on. "Let's see... that cross with the two curves and the one dot resembles a 'du', and that spiral thing with a diagonal line, I think it's a 'ra'." He switched positions. "And that one is making me think of a--"

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

"Huh?" the two said together, their heads coming up to look at the front door. "You expecting someone?" Ranma asked. Lina shook her head. "Then who could it be..." He got up, closing the book and leaving it on the couch.

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

"Hello?" came the voice from outside. "Ranma, I know you're in there! It's way too early for you to be out, so open up!"

Ranma and Lina looked at each other. "Nabiki." they said in unison.

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Kuno dramatically posed, his bokken pointing in some direction in the sky. "There! I see the evil sorceror is making his move! Let us make haste before he corrupts yet another redheaded maiden!" He did two running steps before falling to the ground, unconscious.

"Great-grandmother was right. Stick boy not use brain." Shampoo said to herself, looking at the prone body. She then raised her gaze in the direction the boy had been pointing, to see a fading red light over the mountain sky. "Ayah! Well, maybe not that stupid."

She did a step forward, but stopped suddenly. Her gaze went back to the unconscious kendoist. Frowning, she wondered what to do him.

Thirty seconds later, Shampoo took off at full speed towards the mountain, a tied and gagged Kuno hidden inside a dumpster in the back of an alley.

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Ukyo was having more trouble with her Kuno family relative. More precisely, Kodachi had seen the red light in the sky first and had attacked before Ukyo could react, and she had left the poor okonomiyaki chef tied up and gagged in a ribbon, hanging from the fire escape of a rundown building. Fortunately, Kodachi had, in her haste, left Ukyo's giant spatula only a few feet away to her left; now all Ukyo had to do was to swing enough to cut the ribbon on the spatula's sharp edge. Real easy, of course, if she could avoid the railing that her head would bang into everytime she swung.

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On the other side of town, Akane missed the light entirely. She was way too busy keeping Mousse from running into poles and attacking pigtailed or red shirted guys.

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While Ranma carefully observed from a window if Nabiki was alone, Lina went to the door. The peephole confirmed it was the brunette, but Lina still waited. "I know you're in there!" came the call, and the redhead just sighed. Her persistence was another trait Ranma hadn't exaggerated.

After a quick look in Ranma's direction, who nodded, Lina opened the door, keeping a hand on it, ready to slam it shut at any time. "What do you want, Nabiki?" she asked in a menacing tone.

She held up her hands in defense. "Relax. I just want to talk to Ranma, since I didn't get the chance yesterday."

"Talk? Why would you want to talk to him? There's nothing to say. You just hold your end of the deal and I won't harm you. Now leave before I change my mind." Lina went to close the door.

Nabiki stuck her foot in the doorway. "Wait! Isn't Ranma supposed to decide that? Why don't you ask \*him\* if he wants to talk to me?" Inwardly, she began wondering how Ranma could agree to marry such a controlling girl, even for a cure.

Lina didn't move, thinking. She looked to her left, at Ranma, who shrugged. "What do you have to say?" she finally asked, returning her eyes to Nabiki.

"I want to talk to Ranma. Not you, Ranma. I'm not leaving until then." She crossed her arms, her foot still in the doorway.

A certain fuse was running dangerously short, so Lina raised her free hand towards Nabiki. "Leave." The last warning went unheeded. "Fine then. BRAM W--"

"Lina!" Ranma shouted, suddenly at his sister's side with a hand on her shoulder. Lina blinked, caught off guard, and the gathering ball of energy withered and died in her hand. "If you harm her," Ranma explained, "she'll take it as a sign that the deal is broken and she can tell the others everything." He shot a dark glare at Nabiki. "Don't fall in her game."

Nabiki stepped back, arms halfway up. "I wasn't trying anything, I just want to talk to you, Ranma."

"Well I don't. Listen: I like my new life here. I have peace, I have tranquility, I don't have anybody out for my blood. I'm never going back to my old life, I'd rather die for real than live like that again. So stay silent, keep the deal and leave me alone, all right?" Pulling Lina inside, Ranma closed the door hard, making Nabiki take an involuntary step back.

She looked at it blankly. 'Well, the wrapping was unexpected, but the package is mostly what I was expecting.' She turned around and started down the path. 'I never thought Ranma could put so much spite in his words, though. Almost made me afraid of him. Almost.'

Casually walking down the stairs, hands in her pockets, Nabiki contemplated the situation. Ranma seemed even more stubborn than before, and in the completely opposite direction than his old fiancées, for once. Well, she had warned the girls, and they had had a taste of the new Ranma yesterday; it was out of her hands.

She arrived at the stone wall, and was about to push on the large oak doors when she heard running steps. Curious, she turned around, only to see Shampoo suddenly appearing overhead and running up the stairs, never noticing her.

"What the hell..." Nabiki said to herself as she observed the purple-haired Amazon go up, then suddenly take a sharp left to disappear into the woods. "How does she know where..." She blinked. "Dammit! Those two are going to think \*I\* sent her over!"

She sighed. "Too late to stop her, anyway, even if I could." She leaned back on the doors, thinking. 'I wonder how she knew to come here. She certainly didn't follow me, that's for sure. I got lost, and if it hadn't been for that red light in the sky--'

She hit her forehead at the same time realization dawned. "Nabiki, how can you be so stupid sometimes." Fists on hips, she tapped her foot rapidly in contemplation. "Well, they dug themselves in this hole, and I've no reason to bail them out. This is one situation that I \*don't\* want to drag." She hunched. "Poor little--"

"OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOH!!!" Nabiki shivered as she heard the voice. Of all people... She took half a step back to flatten herself against the door, as Kodachi soared in the sky over her head, not seeing her. Once the gymnast disappeared in the woods also, she allowed herself to relax. This situation was going in the deep end of the shit pool.

"Oh well... Might as well see what happens." she said, a little bit eager, a little bit fearful, as she took off running back to the Inverse house.

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"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Lina asked, barely managing to keep up with her brother. "I mean, we're taking a big risk going out and all, and I don't want this worse than it is already when Father gets back."

"Trust me. When it comes to Nabiki, you can pretty much count on the fact that she won't screw you right in your face, but in a way you can't prove. And the deal didn't include letting the others follow her to the house. I'm not taking any chances."

Lina frowned but didn't say anything. Ranma's interpretation of the deal was in the worst light possible, but it still could be true. Though it seemed that his opinion of everyone from Nerima had worsened every day since he had separated from them, but it probably was because he was seeing more and more the normal life those people had taken away from him. At least, she was hoping that was what it was. She may have only known Ranma for a little while, but she knew

he wasn't the kind to hold a grudge.

They continued to run down the dirt path. She wasn't against going in the forest or the cave behind the waterfall, but when Ranma turned to take the path to the town, she just had to stop him.

She grinned.

"Freeze arrow!" Arms in a firing bow position, the blue-white magic formed between her hands and then sped towards Ranma, who was turning around at hearing her words. Once the arrow hit, everything below his waist became encased in ice, his momentum tipping him forward.

"What the--!!" \*THUMP\* "Dammit!" Ranma pushed his torso away from the ground, then with a good swing rolled around, barely seeing his sister over the big block of ice. "What's the big idea?!?"

"Ranma, as much as I love trouble, there's only so much floor to be scrubbed in the temple, and I don't want to find out what Father would give as punishment after that. I'm trying to keep a social life, here, so you better explain why you want to go \*towards\* the people you want to avoid." the girl sermoned, trying not to let Ranma's situation get to her, though being on his back with his lower section stuck inside a three feet wide hexagonal-shaped block of ice was far from serious.

Ranma smirked. "Afraid of a little punishment? Doesn't sound like you, sis." His right fist came crashing down on the ice. Nothing. Lina smirked. "I mean, scrubbing isn't that hard." The second blow took her by surprise as large cracks appeared from the point of impact. "And I haven't told Father everything about my abilities." The third blow shattered the block completely. Ranma shook the pieces off and stood, brushing his pants. "Eh... sorry, I forgot your question. What were you saying again?" No response. "Lina?"

Lina was shaken out of her staring. "What? Oh! I was asking..." Her eyes fell back to the scattered pieces of ice, none bigger than a fist. "I was wondering why you wanted to go to town." she repeated, voice slowing between each words.

"Because that's the last place they'll expect us to be." Ranma grabbed her by the hand and started back on the path. "And I don't run and hide from anyone."

One eyebrow went up as she let herself be dragged forward. "'Don't run and hide'. Really. Then what is it you're doing right now?"

He shot a dark look at her smirk. "I don't know about you, but I'd like to have a roof over my head tonight. I told you what they did to my mo-- to the Saotome house when they were looking for a ring, right?"

She acquired a thoughtful look for a second. "I don't clearly remember... they... thrashed the house, right? That... wouldn't be good." she said worriedly, thinking about the temple basement her father 'had been meaning' to clean lately. She mentally shivered.

"Yeah. I'd rather explain to Father a few explosions in the middle of

the street than inside the house. Those people can't look behind their backs, so it's the best place to be until we figure out what to do." He looked at her. "Are you going to walk on your own some time?" He let go of her hand.

She smiled. "If you're strong enough to carry me across town, you shouldn't be bothered by simply pulling me along." She tilted her head. "Unless that little show back there sapped all of your strength."

He snorted. "Oh, please. You're just being lazy." He smiled at her. "And what does Father do about laziness?" His smile withered slightly under the glare. "Okay, okay. Let's just go." Hands in pockets, he continued down the path to Niigi.

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A poor passerby blinked as he was suddenly hog-tied in heavy chains. "Saotome! I have you at last!"

\*WHAM\* "Idiot! That's just ANOTHER guy in a red shirt!" Akane sermoned Mousse -- or rather, whatever was under her mallet. After the thirty-seventh time, Mousse wasn't easily recognizable, and the big cracks in his glasses weren't helping him any. "You know, I'm really tired of stopping you from attacking random people." she sighed, putting away the mallet.

"I don't care!" Mousse practically shouted, suddenly standing. "I'll do anything it takes to make sure Ranma doesn't steal my Shampoo again! Ranma will DIE!!!" \*WHAM\*

Akane sighed, fists on hips. "I'm \*really\* getting tired of this. Honestly." She began dragging Mousse away by the foot, mallet still on his head. "Why can't he just see that..."

As the cute short black-blue haired girl walked away with the robed long-haired blind boy, the aforementioned passerby vainly tried to move, still tied up in heavy chains, too tight for him to take a deep breath. "Help."

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"I still say it's a bad idea." Lina muttered, flat against an alley wall. Thankfully not loud enough for her brother to hear. It simply seemed impossible to her for people to be as linear as Ranma described his old companions. They had to have a head on their shoulders. Especially Nabiki. She hadn't received the impression that the girl had betrayed them this morning.

Still, Ranma had more experience than her dealing with these people, and she really wanted the situation as minimal as possible when their father returned, in what could most possibly be described as a downcast mood with the events in Saira. Especially if said events were caused by the spell Ranma had found, thereby related to Father himself. He always tried to ease human suffering, not cause it. She sighed, as things didn't look very promising. "So, where to next?"

"Well, I'm assuming those that didn't follow Nabiki split up in groups to search the town, and that they're going methodically.

Question is, are they going thoroughly or skipping the less likely places I would be. I'm still thinking." Not once in his answer did he look her way, always watching out in the street.

Lina blink-blinked, wondering if this was the real Ranma in front of her. She shook the notion out of her head. "Ranma, this may be a small town but it's still big. It's certain they'll avoid searching certain areas if they can." she said.

"I guess." he replied. "But that also means they're spending more time in the streets. We have to be careful." Taking one last good look around, Ranma started down the street without a word. Lina had to take a few running steps to catch up.

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After knocking a good dozen times and peeping through every window, Shampoo was mildly certain Ranma wasn't in the house she had found in the vicinity of the red light in the sky. She would just have made a door and turned the house upside down, but after the Saotome house incident, Cologne had told her to be discreet, and this morning had repeated, in a monologue she had only nodded to while mostly tuning it out, not to destroy other people's property.

Left with no option but to look somewhere else and return later, Shampoo started rounding the house to return to the dirt path. Then she heard a massive and thick oak door being hit in the lower middle, turning it into splinters. If the pitch of the hit was right, then the weapon was cloth-covered metal, most likely a razor-sharp ribbon. Which meant Kodachi.

Her suspicion was confirmed when she heard the spine-shivering laugh coming from inside the house. "OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOH!!! This is the poor conditions that redhaired hussy has my darling Ranma living in?!? She will pay, I swear! OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOH!!!"

Shampoo ran the short distance to the back door and smashed it open, bonbori at the ready. All she found was the standard black rose petals covering left behind Kodachi's trail, still settling all over the large living room. She lowered her weapons. "Shampoo no like this, but at least Shampoo no can be blamed." She started going through the house to the front door.

She stopped, something catching her eye, and picked up a small statuette from a bookshelf. It was a maiden, looking up, hands together in prayer, head covered by cloth. It was made of a strange pale blue stone, soft to the touch. Shampoo put it back while looking around the nicely furnished room. "Shampoo no see what wrong with this place..." With a shrug, she left.

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Hidden in the bushes (she was really starting to hate bushes), Nabiki watched first Kodachi, then Shampoo leave. Once out of sight, she silently went in front of the house to check. As she had thought, the front door was gone, and what she could see of the somber interior revealed flower petals scattered everywhere.

Nabiki sighed. At least the couple was gone, most likely right after she had left. She just hoped they wouldn't blame her. She had other

plans with this.

She turned to leave when her curiosity took the better of her. Looking around once, making sure, she then stepped inside. She blinked a few times, letting her eyes adjust to the lower light, then took a good look around.

To the right was a well furnished living room, a big couch and a few sofas, all white, a few small side tables in-between with metal gold lamps, a large oak coffee table in the center, the far wall covered with books neatly ranged on their shelves, a big screen TV in front of the couch, hiding some of the large window and the white shades.

To the left, there was a bookshelf acting as a half-wall, a column at the end to support the ceiling. After that was a dining room, a long beautifully sculpted rich and dark oak table, with matching tables, a small chandelier hanging from the ceiling right in the middle. There were candle-holders Nabiki hoped were only gold-plated in the middle of the table, which stood out oddly amidst the large paper brown bags, empty take-out boxes and dirty plates. The far wall had silverware in glass displays. The whole thing was reminiscent of old Europe.

Right in front of her, there was the entrance to the kitchen, which seemed somewhat large, if the end of the large wood table she could see was any indication, and the smashed back door was directly ahead. To the right of the kitchen entrance was the stairs, which acted as part of the back wall of the living room.

"Damn..." Nabiki thought out loud. "Ranma married serious money!" She was almost tempted to take a look upstairs. She contented herself on looking in the bookshelf left of the entrance. There weren't many books, though they were obviously unused, without dust. There were small trinkets in-between, not worth much attention except for the gold plating and small gems. On top of it was a small statuette that, though at first glance didn't seem like much, quickly recalled her attention.

She examined it, looking closer. It was a very detailed handmaiden, in prayer, made from a stone she couldn't recognize, a mesmerizing light blue. The top of the shelf was darkened with time, but there was part of a circle surprisingly light. Slowly, delicately, Nabiki put two fingers on the statuette, and turned it to face her, covering the light circle of wood. 'Hmm... Recently moved... One of those two must have done it.' Nabiki took her fingers off the statuette, slowly, almost reluctantly...

She stayed there, eyes locked on the handmaiden. There was... something she couldn't identify, something she couldn't quite put her finger on, that attracted her to the statuette, as if she was being drawn to it. Gently, she picked up the maiden again, examining it more closely, turning it around. It was really detailed, down to the pupils, the expression on her face sincere enough to be lifelike...

'Take it...' a voice said. 'They'll never know... It's obvious at least Kodachi came through here. And why would YOU have taken it? It doesn't have much value, it's only sculpted stone...' Her grip tightened itself on the statuette.

A snapping sound came from the forest, and Nabiki suddenly shook her head, blinking her dry eyes for the first time in minutes. She carefully looked outside, then sighed, looking back at the maiden while scratching her head. "That was... weird." she said to herself.

She rose the statuette to her eye level, examining it once more. "You're more than a simple stone statue, aren't you?" She turned it around, checking for something more, an indication, but even the bottom was smooth stone. "Hmm... I wonder..." A thousand ideas ran through her head. She looked at the maiden once more, examining the more possible scenarios. She looked closer, eyes fixed on the woman's face.

A minute later, Nabiki came out of the house, a determined look on and with a decided step, head full of questions, some not as clear as others.

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Two quick looks gave Ranma the assurance he needed. "Street is clear. Let's go." He quickly went through the street, aiming for the nearest side alley.

Lina followed, slower, tired of this charade. "Ranma, I just don't get it. Why are we doing this?" She sounded bored, and had the attitude to match.

Grabbing her wrist to pull her in the alley, Ranma gave her a look. "I want them off my case, that's why." Him, however, sounded annoyed.

She scratched her head. "But, umm, Ranma, if you want to get rid of them, why not try a direct confrontation?" He gave her a look, eyes half-closed. "What?" Her eyes widened in realization. "You haven't thought this through, have you?" He looked away. "You haven't! You don't even know what you're doing!"

Ranma quickly turned to face her. "Yes I do!" he shot back.

"Then WHAT are we doing?!?" Lina shouted. "'cause it sure don't look like a plan to me!"

Ranma glowered at her. "It's hard to explain, you don't know these people like I wish I didn't." he said through clenched teeth. "Now, you gonna follow me or not? I want to get this done as soon as possible." Not waiting for an answer, he spun around and walked between the buildings.

Lina blinked, confused at the rebuttal. She had expected Ranma to at least cringe when she had shouted at him. What could be so important as to make him forget she was a girl? A light went up. She quickly ran to his side.

"Oh Ranmaaaa..." she sang. "I know what you're doiiiiinnnggg..." He blinked at her. "You want to make sure this afternoon is peaceful..."

"'course I do. I want to get rid of 'em to get some peace and quiet.



I don't want them to ruin my weekend. Hard enough to relax at school..." he answered, half-distracted as he watched the next street. "Come on." He grabbed her hand and pulled her, down half a block to another side alley, this one blocked. "Damn." he commented, looking at the wall. He started to turn around.

Pulling him deeper in the alley, Lina then turned to face him. "Come on, Ranma, I want to know." She smiled, batting her eyes. "What do you have planned this afternoon?" she asked suggestively.

One hand went behind his head as Ranma laughed nervously and started stuttering. "Eh... hehe. I, um, that is..."

Lina smirked. "Ahah! So you ARE trying to get a peaceful afternoon all alone with m--"

"So? You got a problem with that?" he interrupted.

"Me? No, not at all." she beamed. "I'm just glad to see this work out."

Ranma looked down, slightly blushing. "Yeah, well..."

\*hmmmmmm!!!\*

Lina perked up, attentive. "You hear something?" One hand went up to cup her ear.

"Uh? No..." He listened. He finally heard it, some muffled sounds, with clothes ruffling, as if someone was struggling...

\*snap\*

Ranma looked up.

Ukyo fell into his arms.

The two looked at each other, wide-eyed, blinking a few times, synchronized. Ukyo's giant spatula fell, embedding itself in the ground with a resounding tuck.

As fast as he could, Ranma dumped Ukyo, grabbed Lina by the hand and ran for it into the street. Ukyo struggled against her bonds, and now that she had a little slack had no problem freeing herself. She got up, rid herself completely of the ribbon, took her spatula and ran after Ranma. "Get back here, you jackass!"

And the chase resumed.

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"I see him! I see Ranma!" Mousse shouted, pointing down the street.

Akane clonked him on the head, sighing. "Would you stop seeing Ranma everywhere? Put on your glasses, for god's sake." she said, tired.

"My glasses ARE on." Mousse countered, laying on the ground. He shakingly rose an arm to point once more. "And I DO see Ranma over

there. Look for yourself."

\*BIG sigh\* "Mousse, I'm not in the mood, okay? I've had my hopes raised and shattered enough times this weekend. Just shut up." One hand went over her lowered face as she took deep breaths, calming herself. She wasn't going to cry over the jerk. Not anymore, anyway.

Mousse got up and threw his chains in the air. "I'll kill you, Saotome!" he shouted.

Akane was about to clobber him again when she heard the reply. "Not today, duck boy!" Ranma shot back, jumping over the two, Lina in his arms. She looked at him go, wide-eyed, holding that Lina girl rather close (in her opinion). Old habits die hard, as they say.

"Ranma, you jerk! get back here!" "Saotome, you will die!" "Get back here, you jackass!"

Things weren't looking very good.

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One hand reached and put a hand on Nabiki's shoulder. She jumped one foot in the air, startled, and quickly turned around. She let out a sigh at the sight of Nodoka and Cologne, a hand over her beating heart. "Whew! You scared me!"

"So sorry, Nabiki, but you didn't seem to hear me." Nodoka replied, smiling. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Um, well..." Eyes darting back and forth, Nabiki struggled for an answer. "I'm just following a lead. I really want to find him." she finally said. She could read the dubious look on Cologne, but Nodoka seemed to take it.

"You are? Maybe we should come with you." Nodoka suggested.

"Yes... perhaps we should." Cologne added with a smile of her own. A smile that didn't give any good feeling to Nabiki.

"Well, it's not a strong lead, really, I wouldn't want you to search for nothing..." She really didn't want them to follow her, especially since she wasn't going anywhere specific.

"Oh no, we don't mind, do we Cologne?" Nodoka turned to the shorter woman.

"Oh, not at all, I assure you, Nabiki." Cologne answered. The smile was still there.

Some yelling from her left, their right, where a blocked alley was. She turned to look towards the commotion, and they followed. A figure appeared, jumping over the wall, carrying another. Nabiki immediately recognized the two as Ranma and Lina. 'Oh shit.'

Ranma kept on running towards them, looking over his shoulder for signs of pursuit, and so didn't see the obstacle in his path. He tripped and sent Lina flying, who happened to fall right on Nabiki, bringing the two of them down.

Lina got on all four, over Nabiki. "Eh... sorry?" She looked up. She blinked. The two women blinked with her. '#\$%&@#\$%#@#!!!'

Getting up, Ranma looked at what had tripped him. A mass of chains?!? No, wait, that was a guy tied up in chains. "What the--"

"Ranma!" Looking up at the voice, Ranma saw his sister, sitting on Nabiki, looking at Nodoka and Cologne. The two stared back, and they all blinked together. He thought of a few choice words of his own, looked behind to see Ukyo jump the wall, and took off running, grabbing Lina by the hand.

The few first steps were shaky but she managed to keep running aside Ranma, still holding his hand for the rhythm. The two disappeared down the street, followed by Akane, Ukyo and Mousse.

Nodoka and Cologne blinked a few times after the five were out of vision. "That was... unexpected." Nodoka said.

Nabiki got up, brushing herself. "Yeah..." She looked down the street. 'Now I know why Shampoo didn't get Ranma...' She looked back at the two. "Did either of you see Ranma's face when he spotted you?" Nodoka looked down. "He... I can tell he didn't want to see you. Sorry."

"I... I..." Nodoka didn't say anything, looking down, voice full of sadness. "I see..." She took her time to think, swallowing slowly to try to get rid of her sudden dry throat... "I... I... If... If Ranma doesn't want to see me, doesn't want to be with me, maybe I... maybe I should... leave him be." She looked back up at the last words, eyes shining with tears, none escaping.

One hand went up to cover her mouth, not able to say anything. Nabiki had never thought that the woman could have such a reaction. "I don't know if the others would agree, Auntie." Nabiki finally said. "Don't you at least want to know why Ranma did things the way he did?"

She shook her head, slowly. "His reasons are his own, he is a grown man. I can hardly question his decisions..." She turned around suddenly. "Cologne, I would prefer if you stopped chasing my so-- Ranma. Ranma Saotome is dead, you can return to your village with honor." Without another word, she walked off, towards the hotel.

The two left looked at each other, pondering... "Yes, maybe it is the best course of action." Cologne finally said, perhaps more to herself than to Nabiki. "Ranma is certainly not more likely to come with us now, and he is more able to resist than ever. Perhaps I should call this off..."

Nabiki nodded. "I agree, but I don't think the fiancées will... or those out for his blood, either."

Cologne smiled, bittersweet. "True..." She looked up, down the street where Ranma and his companion had disappeared a few minutes ago. "I fear none of them can be reasoned with, however... Ranma will have to find his own way."

"Doesn't he always?" she smirked. Cologne snorted, and with a wave of

her hand, invited Nabiki to follow Nodoka back to the hotel. With a nod, Nabiki started walking.

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"Ranma Saotome prepare to die!"

It took half a second for Ranma to register that the yell hadn't come from behind, but from the side. He jumped sideways a split second before the blow landed where he had stood, taking his sister with him. The two skipped to a halt, facing the new threat.

The small dust cleared and they saw Ryoga, kneeling in a small hole in the street, holding his umbrella downwards. He quickly got up and pointed his weapon at Ranma. "For hurting Akane, you will die, Ranma!"

"Oh, man, I don't need this." Ranma whined, putting a hand over his lowered face. He heard a snicker from his left but let it go. He looked back up at Ryoga. "Ryoga, dammit, you stupid pig, can't you tell that I don't want Akane?!? You can have her!"

While this piece of information made Ryoga think, Ranma and Lina took the opportunity to take off again before the others could catch up. Ryoga blinked at that and joined the chase, slightly in the lead. "Saotome! Stop running like a coward!"

That made Ranma clench his teeth, which did not go unnoticed. "Yes, Ranma, do stop being a coward." Lina teased. He growled, not looking at her. "Say, was this part of your mystery plan?"

"Just run." he shot back. "Maybe we can lose them in the forest." He turned a corner, making sure she made the sharp turn with him.

"Sure, the forest, why not the forest, I didn't mention the forest..." Lina muttered to herself.

They reached the end of the street, and jumped the stone wall separating them from the temple forest. They then took left on the side path, going away from the house.

"Say, now that we're away from the public, why not use a little magic to dissuade them?" Lina suggested.

"I thought you were adverse to using magic." Ranma countered. He suddenly turned into a small dirtpath, Lina barely making the turn.

"That was before these people started annoying me to hell!" she shot back. "I've got some pent-up frustration to release!"

Ranma grinned. "Alright. But let's choose our battleground. I think the clearing overlooking the waterfall would be good."

She smirked, her breathing getting hard from so much running. "I didn't know you had a sense of irony, Ranma." He didn't reply.

They continued down the twisted paths, making sure to leave some marks and making enough noise for the others to follow. After some

time, they finally reached the cliff over the waterfall, stopping ten feet short of the side, right where Ranma had jumped over a week ago. They stood there, facing away from the falls, standing ready, relaxing themselves.

It didn't take long for the four pursuers to catch up. They stopped right after entering the clearing, wary of the two ready fighters. The two groups eyed themselves, not a word passed.

Ranma finally broke the silence. "If you want a fight, you'll get it." His extended hand brought two fingers up and he motioned them to go forward. "Come and get me."

A few moments went by. "No." Akane said softly, relaxing from her ready stance. "No... I won't fight." she continued, shaking her head. "I'm tired of fighting. That's what brought us here in the first place. I just want to talk. Please." She turned a pleading look at them.

Lina and Ranma shared a look, not quite sure how to react. They went closer together, keeping their ready stances, leaning to whisper to the other. "Do you believe her?" she said.

"I'm not sure..." Ranma replied. "This is a first as far as I'm concerned. Akane's never been calm like that before." He looked at her, who was now motioning with her hands for the others to relax too. "Well... it's worth a shot. If we can resolve this peacefully before Father comes back, all for the better." Lina nodded, and they separated. Slowly, they abandoned their ready stances too.

"Okay." Ranma said, loud and clear. "But I want to make something clear first. I'm not going back. I'm NEVER going back." His voice was hard and serious, face even more as he looked at them.

Akane looked down at that, her face a myriad of emotions, as she tried controlling herself. "Why?" she managed to say, through her tight throat. "Why did you leave like that?" She looked back up at him, taking two small steps forward.

"Because you were all making my life a living hell. Always blaming me for things I never did, never giving me a chance to explain, never even giving me a chance to SPEAK! I HATED THAT!!!" He practically screamed, almost furious.

He looked at his feet, taking deep breaths to calm himself. "None of you even treated me as a person." he continued as he looked back up, not at them, but at Akane. "I was just something to use when there were problems and put aside when it was over." He clenched his teeth. "And I hate you all for that." His voice was level, but he might as well have screamed it at the top of his lungs. Ukyo, but mostly Akane, reacted as if slapped.

Lina took a small step to get close to Ranma. "Hum, Ranma, aren't you exaggerating a bit?" she whispered. "I mean, I know they treated you bad, but not like that..."

"Lina, I have to do this myself..." he said to her, exasperated at the whole thing, not bothering to lower his voice.

"But--" she started.

"I said butt out!" Ranma interrupted, slamming a small wind spell in her as he turned, sending her over the edge. The others gasped and did half a step forward, their front foot stomping the ground, but got even wider eyes when Lina came back up, hanging in the air.

And looking somewhat angry. "Ranma, I'm just trying to help here." she said, fists on hips and tapping a foot on nothingness.

"I don't need your help." Ranma quickly replied, giving her an angry glare over his shoulder. "I can handle this myself." He turned back to look at the four.

"Fine. Okay." Lina conceded, throwing her hands in the air. "But don't blame me if this all goes wrong. I'm going back home." Not waiting for a reply, she turned around, lowering herself as she flew away.

Ranma waited a little while, before smiling crookedly. "Now that we're alone, how can I make it clear to you all that I don't want anything to do with any of you?" he asked, dead serious.

Akane took two more steps, bringing her ten feet from Ranma. "No! You can't mean that!" she pleaded, desperate for a trace of the Ranma she had known, of the Ranma she had cared for, of the Ranma she had... loved.

"I do." he said through clenched teeth, taking a step forward, fists forming to his sides. "I don't care about you. I don't want anything to do with you. I want you out of my life." He took a step for each statements. "Now leave me alone."

"NO!" Akane shouted, pleading, eyes full of tears.

Ranma lashed out, taking the last step forward to punch Akane right in the face, breaking her nose as she fell backwards in a small trail of blood. "Aren't you LISTENING to me?!? I told you to leave me alone! What part of that don't you understand?!?"

Akane looked at Ranma from the ground, wide-eyed, two fingers up to her swollen nose, blood on the tips. She was shaking like a leaf, afraid for her life in front of this mad Ranma. The others were equally wide-eyed and shocked, never having expected this from the Ranma they all knew -- no, the Ranma they all \*thought\* that they knew.

Ranma sharply turned around. "Now leave me alone." he said, beginning to walk to the cliff.

"You don't get out this easy!" "SAOTOME!!!" "Die!"

Spinning around too fast to see, Ranma spread his two hands towards them. "Mono Volt!" Arcs of electricity shot from his hands and hit the three standing, sending them into convulsions as the spell paralyzed them, dropping to the ground.

Ranma turned around again. "I'm more than capable of killing you with a word. Don't make me." He walked the few steps to the cliff, paused a second to take a breath, and jumped, casting his flight spell half-way down. He quickly set down on the other side of the

waterfall, and started his way home, not feeling particularly well.

He arrived home to find the door smashed, and, curious, hurried inside. He found the living room covered in black rose petals, which he immediately recognized as Kodachi's. 'Damn.' Then he spotted Lina and Mei.

'Lina and Mei?!?' his brain shouted back, and he double-looked. Mei was laying on the couch, apparently unconscious, as Lina applied wet cold compresses to the girl's forehead. He hurried to her side. "What happened?!?"

"Ranma? Hum..." Lina hesitated. "Maybe Father should tell you." she said, pointing behind him.

"Huh?" Ranma turned around, to see his new father standing there, just out of the kitchen. He was a tall man, his short purple hair coming in upraised tips on either side. His eyes were closed, as always, yet Ranma had yet to see him stumble or trip into something. His large red robes covered his frame well, but Ranma knew the power that resided in him. The last thing was his staff, red orb at the tip, the four rings inside the small frame surprisingly silent at the moment. Rezo, the Red Priest.

"Father?" Ranma asked, confused and surprised.

"Yes, Ranma. The incident in Saira caused me to return early." he said with his usual small smile. "Now, I believe you have some explaining to do..."

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End Chapter 4

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End  
file.